

Fork Union Depot
Cohasset
Fluvanna County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-978

HABS
VA
33-COHAS,
1-

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

Addendum to
Fork Union Depot
Rt. 6
Cohasset, Fluvanna County
Virginia

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FORK UNION DEPOT

HABS No. VA-978

Location: Rt. 6 (Secretary's Road), Cohasset, Virginia
UTM Coordinates: 17.37512.418345
(Palmyra, Virginia
Quadrangle)

Present Owner: Fluvanna County Historical
Society

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: None

Statement of Significance: Although its importance is primarily local, the Fork Union Depot in its history and architecture is typical of the small station houses on the C & O and other American railroad lines, built around the turn of the century, many of which have been lost or soon will disappear.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The depot was built on land which was once part of the nineteenth century Wheatland estate of the Snead family. The following references are located at the Office of the Fluvanna County Clerk, Palmyra, Virginia. Photocopies of these deeds may be found in the Appendix.

1906 Unrecorded deed. See related information in Deed Book 6, pp. 26 and 27. Dr. George T. Snead to R. L. and Lettie Dickey. Approx. 100 acres.

1907 Deed July 24, 1907, recorded October 4, 1907, in Deed Book 3, pp. 138 and 139. R. L. and Lettie Dickey to The Virginia Air Line Railway Company. Approx. one and a half acres.

1908 Present railroad depot built on above site.

1912 Deed July 12, 1912, recorded the same day in Deed Book 6, pp. 398-400. The Virginia Air Line Railway Company to The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company. In this document the C & O purchased the entire Virginia Air Line Railway, and consequently the Fork Union Depot.

1976 Deed April 21, 1976, recorded the same day in Deed Book 117, pp. 166 and 167. The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company to The Fluvanna County Historical Society. Approx. one half acre which includes the Fork Union Depot.
2. Date of Erection: 1908.
3. Architect: Unknown. Plans follow standard pattern used by American railroads at the time. It was common for a non-architect in the chief engineer's office of a railroad to design most depots.
4. Original Appearance: From observation and interviews there seem to have been no significant additions or alterations made to the Fork Union Depot. However, based on an old postcard of the depot and information from the last station-master, Mr. Francis White, the original exterior color of the building

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The modified Stick Style building is a good example of the once familiar railroad depots, built across America around the the turn of the century.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all Dimensions: The one-story building is 24 feet 2 inches by 38 feet 11 inches. A 3 by 8 foot bay for the dispatcher projects from the east facade. A loading platform on the west side of the station measures approximately 7 feet by 16 feet.
2. Foundation: The station has an open foundation of wooden sills resting on concrete piers.
3. Wall Construction, Finish and Color: The exterior is board and batten, presently painted white.
4. Structural System, Framing: All the walls are of a conventional wood framing.
5. Chimneys: There is a small brick chimney at the ridge of the station which originally served two coal and wood burning stoves.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: There is an exterior door with multiple, raised panels for both the white and black waiting rooms. At opposite ends of the freight room (east and west) are sliding doors of narrow boards in a chevron pattern.
 - b. Windows: The depot has tall two-over-two sash windows on the east, south and west sides. On the north is a long, stationary window with multiple panes.
7. Roof: The building is covered by a gabled roof with

Lindsay on the Washington Division, thereby bypassing Fork Union proper over two and a half miles east of this line. Soon after the tracks and depots on the Virginia Air Line were completed they were sold in 1912 to the C & O, and the railway became a division of the larger company.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Color postcard, ca. 1910, of the Fork Union Depot, in possession of Mr. Francis White, Cohasset.

2. Bibliography:

Bransford, H.M. (Mrs.). Interview: September 1977.
(Owner of commercial buildings and house adjacent to the station.)

Chesapeake and Ohio Historical Newsletter. September 1974.

Dixon, Thomas W. "C & O Depots and Telegraph Cabins." Chesapeake and Ohio Historical Newsletter. July 1972.

Fluvanna County Historical Society Bulletin. No. 16. April 1973.

Frazier, Harry. Recollections. Huntington, W.Va.: C & O Railway Co., 1938.

Hanson, Raus McDill. Virginia Place Names: Derivations, Historical uses. Verona, Va.: McClure Press [1969].

Smith, L.N., Jr. Correspondence: October 1977.
(Engineer of Buildings, Chessie System, Huntington, W.Va.)

Turner, Charles W. Chessie's Road. Richmond: Garret & Massie, 1956.

Walsh, R.E. (Mrs.). Interview: September 1977.
(President, Fluvanna County Historical Society.)

White, Francis. Interviews: September-December 1977. (Former Fork Union Station-master, Cohasset.)

was not its present white but was red, with the trim, brackets, window frame and doors painted white. On the interior, earlier colors, possibly original, were recently exposed after some shelves and other semi-permanent fixtures had been removed. Unlike the current green and white scheme, the uncovered one used white only for the ceilings, with gray for the walls and red for the dado. Only the waiting rooms and the ticket dispatcher's office were painted in this manner; the interior of the large freight room was never painted.

According to a 1919 plan for a proposed extension to the freight room (which was never built), there was a large loading platform on the south and east sides of the station. If ever built, all traces of this platform are gone. (See Appendix.)

B. General History Connected with the Depot:

Before it closed in 1970, the Fork Union Depot served as a typical small railroad station of its day, handling, prior to the end of World War II, four passenger trains plus freight daily. Much of the local commercial business was associated with the nearby sawmill, canning factory, and two small oil storage companies. The passengers came from the surrounding farms, small towns, and the Fork Union Military Academy. In addition, the station served the community of Cohasset itself which grew up around the depot soon after it was built - a general store and post office, four houses, a very early gas station, all of which still stand. Mrs. Lettie Dickey, who with her husband sold the land for the station to the railroad, had named the town Cohasset for her hometown in Massachusetts.

The railroad line which the Fork Union Depot served was built by the Virginia Air Line Railway, beginning in 1908, to connect the James River Division line of the C & O to the south of Cohasset with the Washington Division line of the C & O to the north. This was done so that coal and heavy freight trains coming east from West Virginia and the Ohio to Washington, D.C., and beyond could avoid the long mountain haul on the Washington Division of the C & O between Clinton Forge and Gordonsville. For the most economical and shortest connection, the 30 mile track was laid in a somewhat straight line from Strathmore on the James River Division to

black asphalt shingles. A simple nailed truss system helps support the roof. (See diagram in Dietz, Dwelling House Construction, p. 124.) The eaves overhang all sides of the station by approximately 4 feet and have braced brackets at the building's four corners and along the west facade. The gable roof at the dispatcher's bay intersects the main roof at a right angle.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plan: A central hall which served both as a passageway and the ticket/dispatcher's office divides the interior into two equal spaces. One of these; at the front of the building south of the hall, was used as a passenger waiting area. A floor-to-ceiling partition divides this particular space into two waiting rooms. Although this divider curiously abuts the area's north wall in the middle of the ticket window, the partition is probably original or nearly so, since its materials are identical to those used in the rest of the interior. In addition, information from long-time local residents and railroad documents indicate that from the time of the station's construction there were probably two waiting rooms, one for blacks and one for whites. The space to the back of the depot and north of the transverse central hall was used as a freight room. The floor of this room is two and a half feet higher than those of the rest of the building.
2. Stairs: A short flight of steps leads from the ticket/dispatcher's hall up to the freight room.
3. Flooring: There is three inch wide hardwood flooring in the waiting rooms and ticket/dispatcher's hall. In the freight room 2 by 6 inch hardwood planks are used.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Two inch narrow vertical boards with a beaded edge cover the walls and ceilings of the waiting rooms and ticket/dispatcher's hall. These surfaces are painted white with a green dado. The freight room has no narrow boards covering the walls or ceiling, the framing of the walls and roof being left exposed and unpainted.
5. Doors: The two interior doors, those from the

ticket/dispatcher's hall to the freight room and the white waiting room, are identical to the exterior ones and are painted green.

6. Trim: A simple molding with a concave central strip and a beaded edge is used around the doorways and windows of the waiting rooms and ticket/dispatcher's hall. Corner blocks with a plain circular pattern in the center appear at the top of the doorway and window molding. The only trim at the base and top of the walls is a simple shoe molding.
7. Hardware: All of the original hardware, some elaborately patterned, seems to be intact. A freight scale, some five feet high and four feet wide stands freely in the freight room, close to the south wall. Cast-iron Tuscan columns, with the unorthodox addition of fluting, support a steel mechanism and a wooden entablature. The other elements of this unit are located either flush with or just beneath floor level.
8. Lighting: The station was wired for electric lights in the late 1930's or early 1940's. This system consisted of a single light bulb suspended from the ceiling in each of the depot's four rooms.
9. Heating: Coal and wood burning stoves in the white waiting room and the ticket/dispatcher's hall were the only heat in the building from the time it opened until it was closed.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation: The station sits on a site sloping down from the front (south) to the back (north). The depot site is bounded on the south by Virginia Rt. 6, on the east by the abandoned C & O tracks, on the north by the former cannery and several oil storage tanks, and on the west by the service road to the oil company and the vacant general store and post office.
2. Outbuildings: The only outbuilding is a small, white board and batten coal house approximately ten feet square.

PART III: PROJECT INFORMATION

This class project was undertaken by the School of Architecture, University of Virginia, under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Associate Professor of Architecture, measured and drawn in the fall semester 1977 by Vanessa Patrick and Lloyd Ostby. The documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff.